

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

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Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 10, 2004

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CONYERS SAYS JUSTICE DEPARTMENT CANNOT VERIFY PATRIOT ACT CLAIMS

Congressman John Conyers, Jr. issued the following statement regarding the Justice Department's answers to questions relating to their efforts concerning the war on terror:

"The Justice Department finally sent answers to questions we asked over six months ago; considering how non-responsive the answers are, it is difficult to understand why it took so long. Overall, these responses demonstrate a law enforcement agency that is unaware of what it is doing, that is seeking powers it may not even need, and that believes it is unaccountable to the American people. For instance:

- The Justice Department wants people imprisoned if they disclose that they received secret FBI subpoenas, but dodges questions about whether its own officials should be held similarly accountable for violating gag orders imposed upon the Department (page 10).
- The Department and the FBI want people imprisoned for violating gag orders in secret subpoenas. When asked how many such gag orders have been violated, the FBI could not provide evidence that any violations have even occurred (pages 23-24).
- The Department and the FBI want courts to be able to force people to comply with secret FBI subpoenas. When asked how many recipients of such subpoenas have failed to deliver the requested information, the FBI could not produce a single instance of non-compliance (page 24).
- A Department official testified before the Subcommittee that the government has decided against using secret wiretap evidence in immigration proceedings because it would have had to disclose the use of such wiretaps. When asked how many times the government had made such a decision, the Department said it had no records of this occurring (page 17).
- A Department official testified that there have been cases where the government did not try to deport dangerous persons because deportation would have required the disclosure of secret evidence. When asked for specifics on these cases, the Department replied that it has information but refuses to provide it (page 17).
- The Department says the law does not prohibit people suspected of membership in terrorist organizations from buying firearms. At the same time, the Department does not believe the law should be changed to prohibit terrorists from obtaining firearms (pages 20-22).
- The Department would not even acknowledge that keeping assault weapons away from terrorists will help in the war on terrorism (pages 20-22).

"I can only hope that John Ashcroft's successor as Attorney General will ensure that the Department is able to answer basic questions about what it is doing in the war on terrorism and will seek authorities that actually will keep Americans safe from the threat of terror."

The response can be found on the Democratic Judiciary Committee website at:
http://www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/crimehr3179followupresp112404.pdf

##JUD-108-12/10/04##